

GIFTS CONTINUED (PART 4)

Romans 12:9-13

INTRODUCTION

In our last visit to Romans we covered the list of spiritual gifts found in Romans chapter 12. Before we continue I would like to bring us back to verse 3, which appears right before the list of gifts. It is important to see what comes before and after the list of spiritual gifts so that we can see the context and attitude surrounding the spiritual gifts. The attitude surrounding the gifts is going to be our focus today.

It is my belief that if we focus on the stuff before and after the list of gifts we will have no problem discovering or using our spiritual gifts. If we have the right attitude and devotion to Christ and devotion to one another, then the gifts will just come.

ANALOGY - THE GIFTS ARE LIKE SEEDS

A spiritual gift is like a seed. Discovering your spiritual gift is like planting your seed in the ground and spreading good soil and water and then just watching your seed grow into a plant. Spirit empowered devotion to Christ and to one another is like the soil and sun and water that grow the seed of the spiritual gift. Trying to discover a spiritual gift without Spirit empowered devotion to Christ and his body is like planting seeds on dry concrete. Set the right conditions and spiritual gifts will spring up all by themselves.

Today we are going to talk about setting the right conditions so that spiritual gifts will spring up and be recognized by everyone. If someone came up to you and put a seed in your hand you might have no idea what kind of seed you have been given. The only way to discover what kind of seed you have been given is to plant it and water it. Then when the seed

grows up you will be able to identify the seed. Focus on setting the right conditions and we will not have to feel pressure to discover what kind of spiritual gift we have been given. It will grow and we will then identify the gift with no problem or fretting.

3For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

The point here is that some people serve the church but they are really serving their own need to feel important. Spiritual gifts are discovered when we love other people enough to serve them and help them and bless them. The gifts are for building up the church. Not for making me feel complete or valuable. We are complete and valuable because Christ says so. Not because of what we can do or prove.

Let's jump to verse 9 and see what comes right after the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12.

9Let love be without hypocrisy

This can also translated to say; "let love be sincere." What does insincere love look like? It looks like the Pharisees who pray in such a way that people say; "hey aren't those Pharisees fantastic." They wear flowing robes and religious bells and whistles with the motivation of being noticed and applauded. They might be caught looking into the mirror and singing how great thou art. When they show love it is not love from the heart. It is a plastic smile and all words but no love and no practical help.

If we say we love one another then let people mistake us for brother and sister because that is how we live our lives. Spiritual gifts are discovered in the context of doing what is most loving for one another.

Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

The NIV says; “hate what is evil.” Our sanctification process is God teaching us to hate sin as much as he does. Notice the word cling. Paul did not say do what is good. He said grab hold of what is good and don’t let go. If life is pulling you away from what is good, cling to what is good as if you are hanging on for your life.

10Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

The Greek word for “be devoted,” means the type of loyalty and affection that family members have for one another. To love one another is the 2nd greatest command that summarizes everything God wants us to do for one another. By loving one another people will identify us as Christ followers. ***Romans 5:8*** says; “***while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.***” Christ laid down his life for us. If we want to be like Christ we must lay down our lives for one another.

What does it mean to give preference to one another? It means that if I prefer to stay home and charge my batteries but someone really needs me to visit them in the hospital I prefer to visit them in the hospital. It means that if I prefer to buy louder and bigger stereo speakers but my brother or sister do not have food, I prefer to see my brother or sister have food because that would give me more joy than anything I could do with the money. It means that if I prefer to work on my yard but my brother’s vehicle is broken down, I prefer to let the grass grow and help my brother with his car because that would give me great joy. That is the life of Christ at work in our hearts.

Remember, these are the attitudes that surround the spiritual gifts. Have these attitudes and do these things and the spiritual gifts will naturally grow and be discovered.

11not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

STORY – CROSS COUNTRY LESSONS

When I ran cross-country I remember how difficult it was to keep up with the top runners and not lag behind. Something I could not do today unless a bear was chasing me. One of the things that really stood out to me about the best runners is that they had a consistent desire to run the good race and finish in the top 5. That is all they talked about and trained for.

There were some basketball players who went out for cross-country because they wanted to stay in shape. They did not care about winning the race. Most of them just wanted to get a little exercise and goof off with their buddies. When we were in training one of the basketball players was known to hitchhike his way back to the school. In the races the halfhearted runners lagged way back from the leaders. They did not really have the mindset to win.

In terms of serving the Lord we have to wake up each day and say like the apostle Paul that I want to run the good race. I want to live for Christ and do his will. This takes a great deal of determination and focus.

To lag behind means that we know what to do but we don't really care if we follow through even when other people are giving their full effort.

APATHY OR TIRED? THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

There is a difference between apathy and being tired. When Jesus was tired he retreated and recharged his batteries. He did not feel a need to stay busy all the time just for business sake. We are humans and sometimes we get tired and need to rest and recharge. But inactivity that comes from apathy is unacceptable. When we don't act because we don't care about one another the heart of Jesus is not in us. We have to care about one another to use our spiritual gifts. That is the way God makes it work. God puts on spiritual gifts on line when he causes us to care enough to take action.

12rejoicing in hope,

I don't know if you have ever done a job that is very difficult. I remember working in a fish-packing factory when I was between ministry jobs. It was one of the worst jobs I ever had. After my first shift I could not even move my hands. They were numb and curled like claws. What kept me going? The satisfaction of getting that paycheck and knowing that I found a way to help the family no matter the cost. I kept my focus not on how hard the work was but on the hope that my efforts would pay off. That kind of *looking ahead* mindset is what we need to rejoice in hope.

Titus 2:12 12...deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

The way we live a godly life is to keep the return of Christ in mind. Our struggle will end and our steady service will be rewarded when Jesus returns. That day is sneaking up on us all. We need that *looking ahead* mindset focusing on the return of Christ so that we will have the motivation to continue serving him.

persevering in tribulation,

Normally Christians in this country do not experience true persecution like the Christians in Rome. We are not torn apart by hungry lions, nor are we told to deny our faith or die. That day may come but we suffer little compared to the Church of Rome and many 1st century Christians. Around the world however many people are killed each year when they convert from Islam or Hinduism to Christianity.

The greatest tribulation we face is when we are called to faith in Christ and our family gets upset with us. Or perhaps people we used to party

with will no longer be our friends because our new life in Christ is now in sharp contrast with the way they are living their lives.

Another source of tribulation is in the realm of spiritual warfare. Satan is constantly trying to discourage us and point out our failures. He wants us to give up and surrender a spiritual war that we have already won in Christ. He wants us to look at the hard work and focus on that instead of the reward and return of Christ. That is why we need to keep giving words and acts of encouragement to one another. That is what defeats the negative messages of Satan and his workers of evil.

devoted to prayer,

Like many of you I cannot say that I am completely devoted to prayer in the traditional sense. I do not spend as many hours on my knees as I should. That is an area that does not come naturally to me. We need people to spend hours on their knees.

What I do well is spend a lot of time in walking prayer. When I see someone I know, I pray and ask God to give me the words to say that will encourage that person to get closer to Christ. When I am going about my business I have a running conversation with God. Prayer should be both a lifestyle and an event. It is an ongoing exercise and a drawing away with the Lord.

Jesus drew away and spent a lot of time praying. Prayer is where the things we know in our mind come alive in our spirit. Prayer is one of the ways we become aware of God's will.

Our relationship with God is a personal one. We have a personal relationship with God. And in any relationship people feel closer to one another when they speak frequently to one another. Prayer is not a thing to

do; it is a relationship to invest in. Being devoted to prayer is being devoted to a relationship with a personal God.

13contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

If we are really connected to the truth that we are brothers and sisters in Christ we will have no hesitation to give to those in need and greet people with love and invite them into our lives. When we give preference to one another your burden and your problem becomes my problem.

In Acts chapter two we see that the church shared all things in common. What has been given to me has been given to the entire body of Christ. If I have extra it is because God knows that someone in the body of Christ has a need.

Only the Spirit of Jesus can give us this kind of love. On our own we look out for number one. Filled with the Spirit of God we love others as we love ourselves.

SUMMARY

God has given us many things to focus on. When we focus on these things the spiritual gifts will just come naturally and be recognized. When we love we might discover that God has wired us in a unique way to encourage or counsel those who are discouraged. When we give preference to one another we might discover that we are gifted and given a passion to show mercy. When we show hospitality we might discover that we have a knack for showing the love of Christ by sharing our home and our table. It is only in the context of love and giving preference to one another that the gifts are discovered. The gifts are to bless other people and can only be discovered in a relationship context with a servant's heart. Let's read the text we have covered. Do this stuff and you will automatically be using your spiritual gift, even if you have not figure out how to put a name on it yet.

9Let love be without hypocrisy Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

10Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Did you realize that spiritual gifts are not discovered in a test or survey? They spring up all by themselves as we love one another and serve one another in love.
2. Would you classify your life right now as being devoted to one another in brotherly love and giving preference to one another in honor?
3. When you retreat from serving and loving one another is it because you are tired, or is it due to apathy? If some of it were apathy would you pray that Jesus would give you more of his love and passion for his people?
4. Are you keeping your eyes on the joy of serving and the reward of Christ at his return?